

The Healthy Workplace Act and What You Need to Know About Bullies and Weasels

By Lorna Stremcha

Sunday, January 14, 2007

BACK GROUND INFORMATION PERTINENT TO MY PERSONAL STORY

By Lorna Stremcha

- I was abandoned many times as a child, once for three weeks. During this time I cared for two brothers and sister. I was 8 years old. I survived.
- I lived without electricity and went to bed on an empty stomach many times. I survived.
- I was a "ward of the state" and have been sexually assaulted by a foster brother. I can still feel his class ring pounding my head. I survived.
- I was raped by a seventeen year old; I was about 5 years old. I remember it vividly. I survived.
- I once was in a hurricane. Stripes ran across our lawn. I can still smell the electrical fire. I was only about 4 years old. I survived.
- I watched my mother be beaten by every man she married. I can still see her bruises and swollen face. I survived.
- I lived with abusive and alcoholic parents when I wasn't living in foster care. I can still smell the alcohol and cigarettes. I survived.
- I left home when I was sixteen to live with guardians, graduated and put myself through college with no help. I survived.
- I was sexually assaulted, harassed and bullied in my workplace. I survived.
- I'm one of the lucky ones, I can tell my story and I shall and I shall tell it often.

BULLYING- WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO PROTECT THE WORKERS OF MONTANA

- Workplace violence robs the victim/target, his or her family and society of talented and bright employees, managers and etc. And we allow it, because we have no law that protects the worker from such violence. Welcome to "Bullying and What You Need to Know."

Quotes:

- “ Whilst those on the shop floor have always been at risk of being on the receiving end of unpleasant behaviors of workmates and supervisors to such an extent that it is an ‘accepted’ practice and one ‘just has to put up with it’, the epidemic of bullying that is sweeping the workplace now potentially affects everyone from shop floor to executive levels.”

~ Tim Fields, 1996

Workplace Bullying Defined

- Workplace Bullying is the repeated mistreatment of one employee targeted by one or more employees with a malicious mix of humiliation, intimidation and sabotage of performance.

Workplace Bullying

- Workplace Bullying is psychological harassment.
- Workplace Bullying is psychological violence.

Workplace Bullying is a Different Kind of Discrimination

- It causes physical damage
- It creates loss of social support
- It creates economic reduction or loss
- It causes psychological injury

Workplace Bullying

- is 2-3 times more prevalent than illegal discrimination
- is sub-lethal, non-physical workplace violence.
- approximately 1 in 6 workers directly experience it
- is a more general type of harassment that crosses gender, race and age boundaries.

How does it differ from sexual harassment?

- Bullying incidents tend to be trivial and cannot stand-alone to merit disciplinary action or grievance action.
- Bullying differs from sexual harassment in that it is not identified after one single incident. It is an accumulation of small incidents, which slowly grow over a long period of time. Whereas; sexual harassment can be the result of a single incident.
- Bullying occurs:
- (Usually, but not always) when one person or many persons in positions of power, authority, trust, responsibility, management, administration, etc... feels threatened by another person or subordinate that displays qualities of ability, popularity, knowledge, skill, strength, drive, determination, tenacity and success, which the bully him/herself believes he/she can never possess.

How to recognize a bully:

- They often have personalities, which are described as a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.
- They are mean and vicious in private, but innocent and charming in public or in front of witnesses.

- They are convincing and compulsive liars that can lie on the spot.
- Bullies often display high levels of aggression
- Bullies often lack interpersonal skills.
- Bullies often display immaturity.
- Bullies often display insufficient skill levels to fulfill their positions of authority, management, etc...
- Bullies often are unable to accept responsibility for physical and mental well being of those in his/her charge.
- Bullies are insecure and lack confidence, thus causing the bully to use power and intimidation over subordinates or others.
- Bullies generally control subordinates/others by using physical and psychological strategies.
- Bullies seek to increase their own confidence by lower his/her subordinates/others confidence.
- Bullies demean, destroy and breakdown subordinates and others so they can feel good about his or her self.
- Bullies repeat his or her process regularly. The process becomes additive and compulsive.

Why do bullies repeat their process?

- They repeat the process to weaken the target.
- Bullies repeat the process to instill fear and cause the target to lose confidence in his/her self and or abilities.
- Bullies repeat the process so they can gain control and avoid his/her own shortcomings and failings.
- Bullies will go to extreme measures to get what they want.
- Bullies will if necessary recruit help from others in power positions to achieve his or her goal no matter the cost.

Speculations as to why a bully behaves a certain ways

- Bullies behaviors often are exacerbated by their own stresses.
 - Such stresses include, but are not limited to
 - His or her own predominate behavior style
 - His or her own changes in personal and professional areas
 - His or her own financial pressures
 - He or she being bullies or intimidated him or her self
 - The inability to discern from his or her own problems of low self-esteem, indecisiveness and the need of approval.
 - His or her need to make one's self feel good about his or her self.
 - His or her own addictive or compulsive problems

What are some of the psychological damages?

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Loss of confidence

- Low self-esteem
- Personality disorders

What are some of the psychological symptoms of stress due to bullying?

- Anxiety
- Periods of unworthiness
- Permanent or semi permanent feelings of hopelessness
- Panic Attacks
- Periods of tearfulness and irritability
- Sadness
- Lack of concentration
- Forgetfulness
- Loss of humor
- Loss of joyfulness

More psychological symptoms of stress brought about due to bullying:

- Detachment
- Insecurity
- Vulnerability
- Adoption of a victim's mentality
- Heightened sense of grief, bitterness, and resentment
- Thoughts of suicide
- Clumsiness
- Melancholy moods

What are some of the physical complications?

- Aching joints
- Aching muscles
- Asthma
- Chills
- Diarrhea
- Constipation
- Backaches
- Weight Loss
- Ulcers
- Fibromyalgia

More physical symptoms of stress from bullying:

- Headaches
- Migraines
- Tiredness
- Insomnia
- Skin problems
- Poor circulation
- Numbness in limbs
- Fatigue

- Low stamina
- Thyroid problems
- Heart problems

What are the social support losses?

- Isolation
- Abandonment
 - from co workers
 - family
 - friends

What are the income reductions or losses?

- Terminations
- Demotions
- Leave without pay
- Workers' Compensation or Disability
- Loss of benefits
- Loss of savings
- Second mortgages
- Future earnings from chosen career or occupation

How does bullying harm employers?

- It interferes with work performances
- It creates turnover
- It loses the best and brightest
- It strains loyalty
- It fosters distrust
- It exposes employers to legal liability
- It creates an negative image for the business

What do bullies do?

- They nit-pick
- They criticize
- They torment and badger constantly
- They try to get you to believe that you are doing something wrong.
- They fabricate
- They misrepresent
- They refuse to recognize your contributions and achievements.
- They constantly undermine your status, worth, value and potential.

What bullies do continued:

- They treat you differently than other employees.
- They single you out and make big deals out of the smallest things.
- They isolate you from colleagues, coworkers, and others.
- They hold their power over you.
- They separate you from your colleagues, coworkers and others.

What bullies do continued:

- They keep you away from your work place.
- They tell you that you can't be in contact with colleagues, co-workers, and others.
- They spy on you.
- They take notes on you and make up lies about you.
- **More of what bullies do:**
- They patronize
- They shout
- They threaten
- They humiliate
- They try to increase your responsibility and take your authority away.
- They take your sick leave away.
- They take your personal leave away.
- They deny you training.
- They change goals and objectives.
- They destroy, twist and misrepresent everything you say.
- They dismiss you and make you feel like trash
- They make you ill and tremble
- They demean
- They belittle

More about their traits:

- A bully's charm is always plausible and convincing when in the presence of peer, superiors or other.
- Their motive of charm is deceptive with the intent to mask their lack of empathy.
- Their words and deeds are sallow and self-serving.
- They exhibit inappropriate behaviors and attitudes in regards to sexual matters
- They are often sexual harassers, racists, and abusive.
- Bullies exhibit intolerance, impatience and compulsive behaviors with aggression and anger.
- Bullies are unhealthy narcissists with an overwhelming need to portray themselves as wonderful, caring and compassionate people.
- Bullies often are placed in leadership positions.
- Bullies often believe themselves to be highly qualified leaders.
- Bullies cannot distinguish between leadership (maturity, decisiveness, assertiveness trust and integrity) and bullying, which includes: immaturity, impulsiveness, aggression, distrust and deceitfulness.
- Bullies immediately and aggressively deny everything.
- Bullies attack with distorted and fabricated criticisms and allegations.
- Bullies lack a conscience and show no remorse.
- Bullies are selfish, insincere, insecure, immature, and inadequate.
- Bullies fail to recognize or praise
- Bullies favor "selected employees"
- Bullies fail to support
- Bullies are usually insensitive to others needs

- Bullies make unreasonable demands
- Bullies label
- Bullies get others to snitch and criticize
- Bullies overload you with work
- Bullies make trivial demands

▪ **Who bullies?**

School administrators

- Colleagues & coworkers
- Neighbors
- Acquaintances
- Business Managers
- CEO's
- Public Officials
- Law enforcement personnel

Who bullied me?

- Administrators
- Teachers
- Co-workers
- Students
- Parents
- Montana Human Rights worker
- Montana Teacher Union Representatives and advocates
- National Teacher Union Representatives and advocates

Why did they bully me?

- Because I stood up for myself and for what was right.
- Because I filed a complaint of sexual harassment and blew the whistle.
- Because I went against the status quo.
- Because I wasn't going to let it go.

Why did they bully me?

- Because I was different.
- Because they knew they were in the wrong.
- Because they wanted to hide their mistakes.
- Because they wanted everything to remain a secret.

How did they go after me?

- They emailed each other and compared notes.
- They got together and fabricated lies.
- They worked with the State to go against me.
- They went after my family.
- They worked with the Union to go against me.
- They worked with police officers that had an allegiance to the district or

administration to go after me.

- They met with each in clandestine meetings (secretly).
- They worked with some newspaper personnel to go after me.
- They solicited complaints.
- They isolated me.
- They forced me into a state of paranoia.
- They spread vicious gossip about me.
- They tried to make me out to be crazy.
- They chipped away at me destroying my work, and my reputation.
- Administrators began taking notes on me immediately after I voiced my concern.

Quotes from victims that discovered they were being bullied:

- *"I was living a lifetime for women's movie and I was the main character."*
- School Teacher, 2003
- *"My life was a living hell."*
- School Teacher, 2003
- *"I just wanted to die."*
- School Teacher & Parent
- *"I don't understand, what is happening."*
- Employee, School Teacher, School Aide, & Parent
- *"I will never return to my chosen profession."*
- Employee, School Teacher, Paralegal, & Parent
- *"He laughed at me, I am now living with a limp, and have brain damage, and he laughed at me."*
- Victim in the middle of litigation

More quotes from bullies about their victims or targets.

- *"It's hormonal."*
- School Board Trustee
- *"That's to be expected."*
- Superintendent
- *"It's all your fault."*
- Middle School Principal and Manager
- *"You've got an attitude problem."*
- Administration and Management
- *"All grievances and other such staff matters are dealt with by the line management."*
- Administration and Management
- *"All grievances must go through the chain of command."*
- School Administration and Corporations

Statements made about me by bullies with sexual harassment and racism connotations.

- *"She's a crazy b---h."*
Principal from Middle School
- *"That f--- b---h has to go."*
Principal from Middle School

- “Jesus Christ, _____, this is not Nazi Germany.”
- School Board Trustee

Good management, administration, CEO's, and etc...

- Demonstrate and show compassion
- Demonstrate and show empathy
- Follow policies and laws
- Don't breach contracts
- Don't deliberately harm or bring harm to others
- Don't destroy other's work opportunities
- Don't abuse power
- Trespass and take from others
- Make the workplace a positive and productive place to be for its employees and staff.

Differences between a manager and a bully:

- Managers tend to their tasks.
- Managers strive to achieve their goals.
- Managers make resources available to its employees.
- Managers don't target individuals.
- Managers strive to provide their best services.
- Managers minimize costs.
- Managers maximize income available.
- Bullies strive for self-gratification.
- Bullies work hard for survival.
- Bullies waste money.
- Bullies use others
- Bullies have no concern about the company and taxpayers dollars unless it directly relates to them.

“Remember no-one can make you feel inferior without your consent.
~ Eleanor Roosevelt

Ingredients needed to stand up against the bully:

- Support
- A high level of interpersonal skills
- Energy
- Confidence
- Courage
- Resilience

- Controlled behavioral skills
 - Assertiveness
 - Resourcefulness
 - Patience
 - Time
 - Financial Independence
 - Knowledge
 - Drive
- **Without support you will more than likely crumble.**
- Without energy you will more than likely become too fatigued to fight back.
 - Without confidence you will more than likely be destroyed and become so depressed you are unable to move on.
 - Without courage you will not be able to face your bully (ies).
 - Without resilience you will not bounce back. And you will do a lot of bouncing.
 - Without control over your behavioral and emotional state you will not be able to combat the bully and his or her tactics in a logical and sensible way.
 - Without assertiveness you will not be able to confront situations of discomfort and make that phone call or send that letter.
 - Without resourcefulness you will not know how to get help and use it to help yourself.
 - Without patience you will not reach your goal.
 - Without time you will not accomplish anything.
 - Without financial independence you will more than likely lose everything.
 - Without knowledge you will lose.
 - Without drive you will be stopped in your tracks.

Things you need to know:

- Document everything
- Some things become important later.
- When documenting date everything.
- Keep all your documentation in a safe place.
- Keep it organized from the beginning.
- Make copies.
- Keep your copies somewhere else.
- Keep your originals and copies safe.
- **Speak out!!!**
- Tell others what is happening.
- If you are fortunate enough to have a trusted friend or coworker ask them to document.
- Ask others to sign and date documentation.
- Remember the resource person is friend to the company not you.
- Realize most people will take the side of the employer. They want to protect their job.
- Realize many people choose to not believe you.

- Know your collective bargaining contract and get a copy.
- Know your rights get a copy of your rights.
- Get all your personnel file.
- Check it more than once.
- Get copies each time.
- Follow company policy, even when it seems futile.
- Know state and federal laws. If you don't know the laws, find someone that does and study them.
- Remember the only person you can really trust is yourself.
- Find legal counsel before filing any complaint.
- Know that your battle will be long and arduous.
- Know you will have enemies.
- Know that some friends will become enemies.
- Know you are not crazy.
- Know you will feel alone, even when the room is full.
- If possible take a witness to document, sign and date.
- How to respond assertively:
 - State your belief, it's yours and nobody can deny you of that. This should always begin with an "I" statement.
- Label the opinion being expressed as if it belongs to the other person. This should always begin with "you".
- Expect the bully to lie about you. Remember he/she is only interested in protecting him or her self.

- **Refuse to be silent. Support the "Healthy Workplace Bill" It's a bill for today's workers and for future workers.**

Resources and Work Cited

- Lorna Stremcha, Personal Knowledge 2006.
- Lorna Stremcha vs Hill County Public Schools, Cause Number CV-04-22-GF-SHE, 2006.
- Lorna Stremcha vs Havre Public Schools, Cause No. DV-03-187. 2006.
- Field, Tim, Bully In Sight 1996.
- Namie, Gary, "Bully Busters". The Workplace Bullying Institute. 1998.
- Yamada, David, "The Healthy Workplace Bill" Workplace Bullying Institute. 2006.
- Horowitz, Karen, "NAPTA". 2006.
- Blasé, Jo, Blasé Joseph, & Du Fengning "A National Study of the Mistreated Teacher". The University of Georgia, 2006
- Personal Interviews, 2006.
- O'Leary, Tim, Warrior, Workers, Whiners & Weasels, 2006.
- "Hollander Consultants", 2003.
- Bazerman, Max. Judgment in Managerial Decision Making. Jon Wiley and Sons. 2006.
- Great Falls Tribune

- Billings Gazette
- Bozeman Chronicle
- AP Press

Lorna Stremcha
0039010185

Since the beginning of my employment I have put up with such comments like: "scoot your cute little butt over here, I bet it doesn't take long for you to cum, you're a fuckin bitch, you're poop, you're the devil's wife, no, you're the devil himself, if it came to that I'd put you up against him any day, your body language said it was okay" to name a few.

Since the beginning of my employment I have vowed to do my job with pride and competence. I have pushed myself as a teacher and a coach, while all the time being forced to tolerate comments like: "here comes the beauty queen." In spite of rude callus treatment I continued to do my job and believed that things will get better. In spite of this treatment I proved myself by helping my team earn many district and state awards. In spite of being dismissed after winning the State Title, I continued to walk into the classroom and do my job as a classroom teacher always giving to the students the most I was able to give that day.

Since the beginning of my employment: my life has been threatened while walking through the cafeteria, I have been stocked at home and at school, I have been hit by a handicap child, my car has been jumped on and surrounded by three boys with my daughter and I in it, I have witnessed students from my building kill a pet rabbit off school grounds, have been threatened by parents with administrative consent, I have had spit wiped all over my hair, and have been cornered and sexually harassed in my classroom by a stranger, and have continued to do my job with pride and competence.

Since the beginning of my employment I have witnessed children being bullied, sexually harassed, and discriminated against. I have sat with children in tears because someone is calling them names or writing graffiti on their lockers. I have listened and seen students have to tolerate vulgar and obscene actions because administration claims it's not their problem. I have turned e-mails and notes in and written referrals for such offenses. I have helped some fight their battle and stood beside some as they fought. I have witnessed their belief that authorities will make it right only to come back the next day and find the same problem haunting them.

Since my employment I have been subjected to verbal abuse, reduced to tears by administration, been laughed at when I have reported serious incidents, have been threatened when I tried to do the right thing, and have been made the fall guy when something doesn't go their way. I have been forced to put up with lies and rumors that have spread which threaten my character. In spite of this, I have wiped away the tears and have taught with pride and competence while feeling great pain inside.

Since my employment I have taught: courage, responsibility, dignity, pride, tolerance, and justice. I have worked and volunteered many long hours just for the sake of the student. I have been listed in "Whose Who Among American Teachers" and have been nominated for the "Disney Award." I shared in many joys and triumphs with students, while always stressing the value of standing up for yourself and your rights.

Since my employment I have abided by the laws and rules set forth by the State of Montana and District 16 and have taken the Professional Educators of Montana Code of Ethics seriously. Since my employment I have taken responsibility for my individual

actions and have watched others be allowed to break those same laws and rules set forth by the state and district.

Since my employment I have witnessed other teachers take such laws and rules seriously and try to do the right thing and only be slapped with, "what do you want me to do about it?" I have sat and listened to heartbreak and frustrations as they tried to do the right thing for the sake of the child. I have witnessed many teachers and aides leave for retirement reasons and be forced out of a job they truly enjoy, because administration sees them as outspoken or thorn in their side simply because they want what's best for kids. I have witnessed teachers yelled at with a pointed finger when they speak their mind at a faculty or school meeting, because administration doesn't agree with their opinions.

Since my employment I have not understood how laws and rules only apply to some while others were free to do as they please. Since my employment I have been forced to question administrative action, integrity, and responsibility after reporting incidents when I hear such comments as: "you need to take responsibility here," "you should of come to me sooner," "it's not my department," "I'm chalking this up to miscommunications" "you're making this bigger than it is," and "I tried" just to name a few. I have been forced to question how administration can with a clear conscious allow students, teachers, and staff to be threatened, demeaned, demoralized when evidence proves it to be so.

At the beginning of my employment I could sleep through the night without worrying that some administrator, student, or parent might corner me, yell at me, and accuse me. I could sleep because the problem was dealt with in a responsible way. I was treated with dignity and respect.

Today, I must constantly watch my back out of fear that something may happen. Today, I cannot sleep without a sleeping aide and fear the administration that oversees our schools, because they don't want to listen to what we have to say or see what we are seeing. Today, I have to question a district that awards those that break the laws and rules and degrades those that follow them. Today, I am forced to speak out, so schools can be safer places, and not places of bullying, harassment, and discrimination. Today, I am forced to speak for those that are too weak to speak for themselves and for those that have encountered and witnessed incompetence and unethical behavior in the gravest way. Today, I am compelled to be a voice for those that feel there is no hope for dignity, respect, safety, or rights in district 16. Today, I take the first step in hope of making our school a better place to be. Today, I take the first step in making our school a place where students and teachers may find refuge and solace while learning and teaching in and safe environment free from hate and violence. Today I take the first step towards making our school a place where voices can be heard with respect and people will be treated with dignity and trust.